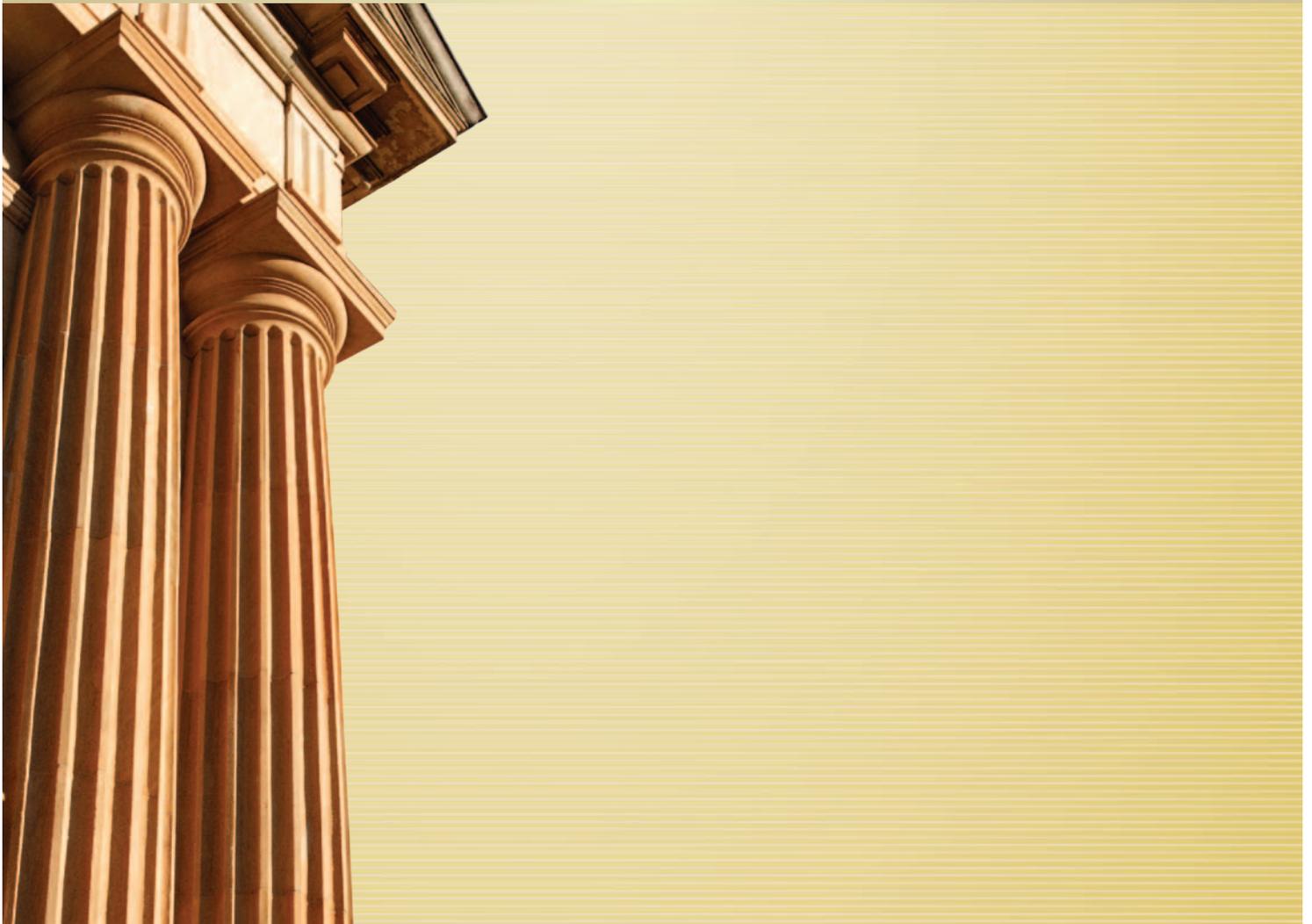


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# Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Joint Hearing

Healthy Families and Communities Subcommittee  
Crime Subcommittee on Lost Educational Opportunities for Kids in  
Juvenile and other Non-Traditional Settings

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# Reducing crime

## Changing the trajectory of troubled lives

### THE PROBLEM

Lost education opportunities for youth in juvenile incarceration facilities and other non-traditional settings

### THE OPPORTUNITY

Policies that support effective and accountable education for incarcerated and at-risk youth

### THE BENEFITS

Tremendous cost savings to the public and the rescue of troubled youth

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### The problem: Lost education opportunities for youth in juvenile incarceration facilities and other non-traditional settings

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- Our K-12 public schools face some of the biggest and most important challenges of contemporary society.
- They were charged with educating 49,298,948 students in 2006–2007. 6,247,443 of these students had learning and behavior disabilities.
- Public schools do not meet all the individual needs of their diverse student populations, particularly those with learning and behavior disabilities.
- Prior experience and research has demonstrated that for many troubled and at-risk students, alternative education settings are necessary.
- Education services and capacities of these alternative settings are insufficient for this population. This results in a pattern of lost education opportunities for these troubled and at-risk populations.
- Resulting uneducated youth create a substantial financial burden to society because of their common unemployment and involvement in crime.
- 612,900 at-risk students were enrolled in alternative education programs in 2002 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002), and 210,390 incarcerated youth received education services in juvenile justice schools during 2006 (Sickmund, Sladky and Kang, 2008, U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention).
- Without education achievement and high school graduation, the life prospects for these incarcerated and at-risk youth are dismal and include an increased likelihood of criminal involvement and limited employment prospects.

- Previous studies document a positive relationship between education achievement and employment. Graduation from high school has been found to significantly decrease involvement in crime (Cernkovich and Giordan, 1992, Massey and Krohn, 1986, Bernberg and Krohn, 2003, and Thaxton and Agnew, 2004).
- Among the tangible economic consequences of our continued failure to effectively educate our at-risk and incarcerated youth is an estimated lifetime economic loss of \$2.2 million for one student dropping out of high school and subsequently becoming involved in a life of crime and substance abuse (Cohen, 1998).
- Research reporting the value of improving education services for incarcerated youth can be generalized to at-risk youth in alternative education programs.

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## The opportunity: Policies that support effective and accountable education for incarcerated youth

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### *Lessons from Florida and the National No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Collaboration Project*

- Since 1998, the Florida State University (FSU) College of Criminology and Criminal Justice has performed annual quality assurance reviews, provided technical assistance, and conducted research on the education programs in the state's approximately 200 juvenile incarceration facilities as part of the Juvenile Justice Educational Enhancement Program (JJEEP).
- Each year the quality assurance standards for these education programs have been evaluated and elevated or revised to continuously improve education services for the more than half a million youth that have been served in Florida since 1998.
- JJEEP's longitudinal research shows that youth who experience higher academic achievement while incarcerated are more likely to return to school upon release and if they remain in school, their prospects for employment are increased and their likelihood of re-arrest drops significantly.
- Based on the success of the Florida JJEEP project, FSU's College of Criminology and Criminal Justice received federal funding in 2005 to assist other states in implementing NCLB requirements in juvenile justice schools. From the project's national surveys of states, conferences held with the states' key juvenile justice education personnel, and site visits to individual states, FSU found that NCLB requirements have improved the juvenile justice education services in many states. However, most states were only partially successful in implementing NCLB requirements. Organizational diversity, lack of consensus on education best practices and, very importantly, patterned difficulty in hiring qualified teachers and general financial scarcity, limited the states' ability fully implement NCLB.
- Most youth in juvenile justice incarceration facilities across the country remain "lost education opportunities." If these youth could receive quality and effective education services, the returns to society would be substantial.



### *Issues to consider*

- Distance learning and video technologies in conjunction with skilled teachers could increase the quality of classroom instruction in small and medium sized populations where it is not financially feasible to employ multiple professionally certified teachers.
- Annual quality assurance reviews and student outcome assessments should be used to evaluate the strength of a program, consider improvements, and calculate funding.
- A national database to track specific program successes and failures could lead to a shared understanding of what the best teaching practices are for incarcerated and at-risk youth.
- Research has yielded three clear areas that have a significant effect on the quality of education:
  1. well-qualified teachers teaching in their areas of professional certification
  2. individualized curricula and instruction that is responsive to the documented needs of the student population served
  3. transition services that prepare youth as they reenter communities, return to schools, and enter the job market

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## The benefits: Tremendous cost savings to public and rescue of troubled youth

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### *Conclusions*

- Public schools throughout the nation have and continue to struggle in the attempt to meet the individual education needs of their diverse student populations.
- The end result is that currently the United States has millions of students in our K–12 public schools that are at risk of entering the School-to-Prison Pipeline.
- We cannot reasonably expect our public schools to meet all of the education challenges and individual needs of at-risk students that far too often fall through the cracks of our education system.
- Consideration must be given to strengthening and improving our alternative and juvenile justice schools currently serving more than one million students annually.
- There are multiple paths to education success for our diverse student population that can lower the likelihood of them becoming criminal offenders.
- The average annual cost to incarcerate a student is \$23,876 in contrast to the annual cost of \$8,701 for educating a K–12 student.
- Prior research has conclusively established that investments that improve academic achievement and high school graduation rates significantly reduce crime and increase economic competitiveness.

## *An illustration of estimated cost benefits*

Effective education systems are a critical component of a successful and prosperous society. Education prepares leaders, inspires innovation, opens minds, and changes the trajectory of lives. It is a necessity for the success of a nation, and it is almost impossible to quantify. If we try to put numbers to it, we find that the cost savings of such a critical part of our culture is, as one would imagine, extraordinary.

If you take the number of juvenile offenders confined in custodial institutions in 2006—210,390—assume varying success rates of that population, and use a lifetime economic gain of \$2.2 million (Cohen 1998) for each individual experiencing success, you will find the following cost benefits to the economy.

## **Estimates of total lifetime economic gain through education in juvenile facilities over 1-, 5-, and 10-year periods**

Education success rate for 210,390 student population	Number of youth prevented from reoffending each year	Economic gain from preventing students from becoming career criminals	Economic gain from preventing students from becoming career criminals	Economic gain from preventing students from becoming career criminals
		For 1-year period	For 5-year period	For 10-year period
1%	2,104	\$4,628,800,000	\$23,144,000,000	\$46,288,000,000
5%	10,519	\$23,141,800,000	\$115,709,000,000	\$231,418,000,000
10%	21,039	\$46,285,800,000	\$231,429,000,000	\$462,858,000,000
20%	42,078	\$92,571,600,000	\$462,858,000,000	\$925,716,000,000
40%	84,156	\$185,143,200,000	\$925,716,000,000	\$1,851,432,000,000
60%	126,234	\$277,714,800,000	\$1,388,574,000,000	\$2,777,148,000,000

This table was developed by Thomas G. Blomberg (2009). The lifetime economic loss per student estimate of \$2.2 million was drawn from Cohen (1998). The amount reflects 1997 dollars in a range from \$1.7–\$2.3 million. Cohen estimates the lifetime cost of a career criminal (\$1.5–\$1.8 million), heavy drug user (\$483,000–\$1,260,000), and high-school dropout (\$469,000–\$750,000). All of the costs are “social costs,” not government costs. Examples of social cost would be lost wages as lost productivity to the society or medical expenses that use resources that could have been spent elsewhere in the economy.

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